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Gabriele Rippl

# 7 Postcolonial Ekphrasis in the Contemporary Anglophone Indian Novel

**Abstract:** Novels by contemporary Anglophone Indian writers are often strikingly 'visual' and replete with intermedial references many of which have so far been relatively neglected by postcolonial critics. Though usually discussed in connection with ancient Greek or Roman texts and Anglo-American literature, the literary device of ekphrasis is a phenomenon found in many postcolonial contexts of literary production around the globe. Prominent examples from the Indian subcontinent which include ekphrases and allusions to Indian visual cultures are to be found in Salman Rushdie *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), as well as in Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006). The latter not only includes descriptions but also material reproductions of press photographs. While Rushdie's and Jha's postcolonial uses of ekphrasis demonstrate the wide range of ekphrastic writing, their ekphrases also open up ethical dimensions by delineating counter models to traditional historiography and critically evaluating processes of religious and ethnic 'othering,' thus, ultimately, making a case for the values of a diversified society – in India and beyond.

**Key Terms:** Postcolonial ekphrasis, *darshan*, Indian visual cultures, communal violence, nationalism, fundamentalism, trauma

## 1 Postcolonial Ekphrasis and Indian Visual Cultures

Literary scholars working in the fields of postcolonial and cosmopolitan studies have traditionally concerned themselves with important issues such as colonialism, imperialism, individual and collective identity formation, ethnicity, race, ideology, post- and neo-colonialism as well as trans-nationalism and globalization. What has not been systematically investigated to date is the conspicuous visual aesthetics and intermedial and ekphrastic nature of many postcolonial and cosmopolitan literary texts. This is all the more surprising since "[t]he ever-expanding and heterogeneous field of intermediality" offers one of "the most promising and invigorating research areas within postcolonial studies today," as Birgit Neumann states in her insightful contribution to this handbook, because "the constitutive and dynamic role of media in construing forms of sociality and perpetuating cultural knowledge, including concepts of identification, alterity and power," turns the concept of intermediality into an indispensible one for analyses of colonial and postcolonial literary texts (↗27 Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures, 512). Against the backdrop of Indian

visual cultures, this article discusses ekphrasis as a specific subcategory of intermediality, namely intermedial reference (cf. Rajewsky 2005, 52; Wolf 2005, 254–255; ↗0 Introduction), in conjunction with contemporary Anglophone Indian novels by Salman Rushdie, the Indian-born novelist and essayist who lives in the UK, and Raj Kamal Jha, a New Delhi-based journalist and novelist.

As a Western literary mode, ekphrasis has its roots in ancient Greek culture and epic literature and is at least as old as Homer's depiction of Achilles's shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad*. James A. W. Heffernan has presented a widely accepted definition which claims that ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation, no matter whether the ekphrastic description is an extended and detailed one or merely a brief allusion in poetry or narrative fiction (Heffernan 1993, 2; ↗also 1 Ekphrasis: Theory; for a critique of Heffernan's use of the term 'representation' cf. Rippl 2005, 97–98). At different times ekphrasis has been understood either as a rather competitive undertaking, a paragone between text and image, poetry and painting, a transgressive method of medial and semiotic translation; or ekphrasis has been seen as a descriptive mode based on collaboration between text and image, which helps to understand the world, to communicate, and to transmit and store knowledge.

During its long history ekphrasis had periods of considerable attention and wide distribution in European literatures, while at other times it was only a marginal literary phenomenon. Today, even with countless images readily available on the Internet, ekphrasis is thriving. A surprising number of contemporary Anglophone novels and poetry collections are replete with ekphrastic passages, and postcolonial, migrant or cosmopolitan literatures written in English are no exception. The enormous increase, availability and rapid circulation of pictures began with the development of photography, which eventually led to what cultural theoretician W. J. T. Mitchell called the "iconic" or "pictorial turn" (Mitchell 1994, 11–34). But while some theoreticians of Western culture such as Marshall McLuhan predicted the decline of the verbal and the end of the 'Gutenberg Galaxy,' the development and dissemination of visual media have met with literary reactions which are far from being solely apotropaic defense mechanisms. Just as the nineteenth-century realist writers found inspiration in the new medium of photography, contemporary literature develops new aesthetic forms through intermedial negotiations with today's visual and social media. To read the postcolonial Anglophone Indian novel against the backdrop of today's mediascapes and to discuss how it negotiates visual phenomena will not only enrich postcolonial and cosmopolitan studies, ekphrasis and intermediality studies, too, profit from placing a new focus on questions of hierarchy, power and ethics which have been central to postcolonial studies. While it has not escaped critics' attention that ekphrastic texts are often saturated with gender hierarchies, as Mitchell has brilliantly demonstrated in his reading of nineteenth-century British poetry (1994, 151–181) – after all the mute visual work has commonly been imagined as female, 'envoiced' by a male voice – other implicit ideologies and hierarchies which inhere in ekphrasis in general or at certain periods of cultural history, such as those of race and

class, have largely escaped critics' attention. Like the gender hierarchy, these racial or class hierarchies project the Other onto the (alleged) medial/semiotic alterity of text and image and the power struggle/paragone that results thereof. The "ekphrastic hope," i.e. the utopian power ascribed to ekphrasis, aims at a translation of the visual into the verbal to achieve vision or iconicity through words and thus represents "'the overcoming of otherness.' [...] Like the masses, the colonized, the powerless and voiceless everywhere, visual representation cannot represent itself; it must be represented by discourse." (Mitchell 1994, 156–157) As a social practice which translates between self and other, ekphrasis "transfers into the realm of literary art sublimated versions of our ambivalence about social others" (Mitchell 1992, 702), a crucial insight for discussions of ekphrasis in colonial contexts. It is important to understand that ekphrasis can serve different aesthetic, ethical and political goals: It can be ab/used as a discourse of power, based on binary thought and a politics of dualisms, which denigrates the other, but – as will become obvious in our discussion of Rushdie – ekphrasis can also be a means to not only accommodate but celebrate otherness, be it medial, ethnic, cultural or religious otherness or one related to gender. The fact that intermedial literature in general and ekphrasis in particular is concerned with semiotic otherness and the intersection of signification systems triggers meta-representational questions (cf. Rippl 2010, 2014) which enable us to disclose the values, belief systems and assumptions underlying our concepts of the verbal and the visual at a specific time and place. In order to investigate the role of ekphrasis in a postcolonial context we need to expand the field of ekphrasis studies beyond the traditional semiotic and aesthetic analyses and look at its epistemological, political and ethical functions, at the many different ways ekphrases are operationalized by different writers to serve specific ends. Focusing on these aspects, which so far have played only a minor role in research, is an important addition to aesthetic theories of ekphrasis because it pays due respect to the fact that ekphrasis can tell us a lot about regimes of representation and regimes of (social and political) power at a certain time and place. Our particular focus in this chapter on the works of two Anglophone Indian novelists pays tribute to the 'postcolonial shift' from the traditional center in the 'West' to the former periphery within the literary system, and aims at bringing into closer contact two fields of current research, namely ekphrasis research and postcolonial studies.

What has been said so far makes clear that analyzing ekphrastic strategies employed in literary works by postcolonial writers is not only an undertaking in poetics, it is also a negotiation of political and ethical issues which includes a renegotiation of "imperial legacies and the ensuing predominance of Eurocentric epistemologies" (↗27 Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures, 513). Since intermediality studies are interested in the collaborations and interactions of different media in the process of meaning-making – after all the term 'intermediality' etymologically stands for between (= inter) and between (= medium), i.e. the translational "in-between" space between media – they "bring to the fore the heterogeneity and plurality of meaning-making and, in a wider sense, reflect the essential impurity and – to use

a central concept of postcolonial studies – hybridity of all cultural formations" (↗27 Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures, 514; cf. also Herzogenrath 2012, 2). Like the concept of intermediality, ekphrasis has so far rarely ever been discussed systematically by scholars working in the field of postcolonial literature, even though there are exceptions such as Mary Lou Emery (1997; 2007, 180–234) and Tobias Döring (2002, 137–168), who have both done important work in connection with the colonial implications of regimes of vision, visuality and ekphrasis in Caribbean literature. There is also a collection of essays edited by Michael Meyer (2009) on word-image intersections in post/colonial cultures and an essay collection on Salman Rushdie and visual culture edited by Ana Cristina Mendes (2012). The "re-visionary effort" (Döring 2002, 166) of postcolonial writers is often preoccupied with countering the colonial gaze, intervening in the existing relationship of visuality and power, trying "to recover an authentic precolonial imagination" (Emery 1997, 261) in a neocolonial context, and with delivering subversive ekphrases of imperialist paintings (cf. Kortenaar 1997 and Kortenaar 2012, who discussed the subversive potential of ekphrasis in Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* where Saleem describes Millais's 1870 painting *The Boyhood of Raleigh*). Since antagonistic and paragonal forces inhere in ekphrasis, postcolonial ekphrasis has been characterized as the urge of postcolonial translation and transgressive transformation (cf. Ramone 2012, 87). As we will see, Rushdie and Jha's novels, too, use ekphrasis' transformational potential to discuss India's colonial legacy of the British 'Divide-and-Rule' maxim, which has fostered Hindu-Muslim antagonism, religious othering and communal violence ever since the Partition of the Indian subcontinent (cf. van der Veer 2002).

While in the context of Anglo-American literature ekphrasis has its roots in ancient Greek epics, an interdisciplinary investigation of Indian literary descriptive traditions and the transcultural mobility of ekphrasis remains to be undertaken. Thus for the time being, the discussion of postcolonial uses of ekphrasis in the Anglophone Indian novel has to suffice. When searching the Internet for ekphrasis in India, the webpage ekphrasis-india.blogspot crops up. It is operated by a group of young Indians who run the online journal *Ekphrasis India* which "aims to bridge the gap between various art forms [and] promotes budding artists and poets by giving them a platform to express their creativity." The poetry writing contest *EI* aims at promoting ekphrastic poetry written about Indian paintings and other artworks, thus making visible India's rich cultural heritage (cf. *Ekphrasis India*). The postcolonial effort of the young Indians who run *Ekphrasis India* demonstrates how powerful a means ekphrasis is to re-vision Indian art and to activate it in the collective memory of the nation. Rushdie and Jha also embark on such postcolonial ekphrastic projects in order to activate collective memory. Their texts belong to the Anglophone Indian novel which "emerged in India in the nineteen thirties and forties, the decade prior to independence, when there was an urgency to foreground the idea of a composite nation" (Mukherjee 1994, 142; for overviews of the history of the Anglophone Indian novel cf. for instance Varughese 2013, 1–23; Datta and Agarwal 2013; Gopal 2009;

Wiemann 2008; Riemenschneider 2005). Writing in English, the *lingua franca* of the Indian subcontinent, allows the novelist to reach not only regional audiences, but the multilingual national and potentially a global readership. While the use of the colonizer's language, English, as the language of Indian literature was a hotly debated topic from the beginning, the publication of Salman Rushdie's internationally successful *Midnight's Children* in 1981 "freed the subsequent English writers of India from the agonished [sic] burden of self-justification" and "has been liberating for a large group of Indian writers living either at home or abroad" (Mukherjee 1994, 145). When we think of Anglophone Indian fiction and life writing which either include pictures or are characterized by a heightened visuality, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), an autobiographical novel by the Indian diasporic-Caribbean writer V. S. Naipaul comes immediately to mind, whose ekphrases of paintings by Constable and de Chirico have not escaped critics' attention. Amitav Ghosh's use of painting in his novel *River of Smoke* (2011) awaits further investigation, as does Khushwant Singh's memorable *Train to Pakistan* (1956), which the Indian publishing house Roli Books relaunched fifty years after the novel's first publication as illustrated text which includes the famous press photographs of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent taken by the American *Life Magazine* photographer Margaret Bourke-White in 1946 and 1947. Another important instance of an Anglophone Indian text which includes photographic material is Vikram Seth's life-writing *Two Lives* (2005). Likewise, Anglophone Indian graphic novels, for instance by Orijit Sen (*The River of Stories*, 1994) and Sarnath Banerjee (*Corridor*, 2004, *The Barn's Owl Wondrous Capers*, 2007, and *The Harappa Files*, 2011), have been published to great success (cf. Varughese 2013, 137–144).

This article discusses the conspicuous literary visuality (↗17 Literary Visuality) and ekphrastic strategies of Anglophone Indian fiction against the backdrop of an important new, and by now already extensive, field of research in South Asian postcolonial and cultural studies, namely Indian visual cultures (cf. Boehmer and Chaudhuri 2011, 15–18). An introduction to India's rich visual cultures can be found on the Tasveer Ghar homepage created by academics in Heidelberg, Durham and New Delhi (cf. *Tasveer Ghar*). This digital network of South Asian popular visual cultures collects, organizes and documents various materials which include posters, calendar art, pilgrimage maps and paraphernalia, cinema hoardings, advertisements, and other forms of South Asian street and bazaar art. Over the last two decades the visual image and 'visual turn' have attracted much attention not only among European and American, but also among South Asian scholars who are interested in the rich materiality of modern Indian visual cultures, an interest "sparked largely by a widespread use of media images in Hindu religious politics of contemporary India" (Sinha 2007, 187). Scholars such as Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Ajay J. Sinha and Christopher Pinney "explore a historical link between preoccupations with the visual image and the experience of modernity in India" and focus "on the centrality of image practices and visual discourses in India" (Sinha 2007, 188). According to Pinney, British colonialism introduced in India a mode of controlling and ordering the sensory

experience (2004, 18), hence 'image' represents "the underbelly of such a hegemonic visual regime. [...] image is not only the visual artifact but, more fundamentally, the visual regime in which Indian artifacts participate, and the social and political affect of visual and material things." (Sinha 2007, 188–189) The "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" (Pinney 2004, 9) regulate and negotiate cultural memory and also the field of values; the 'image' and the visual in general "have become charged with a politics of Hindu religious essentialism (Hinduvata)" (Sinha 2007, 189). By emphasizing how visual regimes are shaped by the interplay of various image practices both Pinney and Guha-Thakurta "pay close attention to the mediating role of technologies such as print, photography and film, and analyze mass-produced artifacts such as art books, posters, and trade labels" (Sinha 2007, 189). Pinney as well as Guha-Thakurta investigate India's visual cultures, past and present, in their work; however, the fact that the two scholars significantly disagree in some aspects suggests "conflicts within the field of visual culture" (Sinha 2007, 190; of course it is problematic to speak of an 'Indian visual culture' in the singular as if there existed a single visual culture in India today). It is worthwhile to discuss Jha's novel *Fireproof*'s visual obsessions, its preoccupation with seeing and gazing, its inclusion of press photographs in connection with the central role of *darshan* (the Sanskrit word for 'to see') in Indian culture and Hindu religion which is based on a close link between seeing and thinking, of image and idea. Pinney's concept of "'corpothetics' – embodied corporeal aesthetics" (2004, 8), which serves to investigate the dynamic social role of the image in India (including its power to engender affect), is closely related to the concept of *darshan*. After all, *darshan* brings the Hindu worshipper and a deity/god prints into a close mutual relationship: The deity sees the worshipper, who in turn is touched by the deity, hence blessed and enlightened. Seeing of the divine/a deity in a picture and the belief in a divine gaze that touches and blesses the onlooker are important elements of Hindu faith and devotion: "Not only is seeing a form of 'touching,' it is a form of knowing. [...] Hinduism is an imaginative, an 'image-making,' religious tradition in which the sacred is seen as present in the visible world [...]" (Eck 1985, 9–10; cf. also Babb 1981). The divine reveals itself visually, and *darshan*, the divine gaze, traditionally implies blessing and visual enlightenment[1] – something we will come back to in the section on Jha's *Fireproof*.

The Anglophone novels by Salman Rushdie and Raj Kamal Jha, which we will discuss in what follows, are characterized by a heightened visual quality and nego-

**1** According to Pinney, darshan's corpothetics of commercially produced god pictures is the opposite of the Western, neo-Kantian imperatives of disinterested aesthetics (the fine art practice of the colonial Indian art schools) and hence a "countertheory of Western visuality" (Pinney 2002, 356); however, this neat differentiation between a universalist Western neo-Kantian aesthetics on the one hand and Indian local darshan-related practices on the other has been criticized as problematic by scholars such as Ajay J. Sinha (2007, 206).

tiations with Indian visual cultures. However, while they share a conspicuous visual quality and preference for ekphrasis, there is also a significant difference: In spite of their ekphrastic richness, to date none of Rushdie's highly intermedial novels combines text with actual pictures; this contrasts with Jha's novel *Fireproof* which combines pictures with ekphrases. Starting from the observation that instances of ekphrasis have not decreased in frequency today, its changing functions, the cultural, social, political and ethical work ekphrastic writing performs in contemporary Anglophone Indian novels will now be investigated in connection with Rushdie's and Jha's novels. The main concern is the question of how ekphrases function in contemporary literary texts that have grown out of postcolonial and migrational contexts (cf. Rippl 2011a, 2011b) and which may (Jha) or may not (Rushdie) include pictures in their material form: What are their objectives and assets? What do they show us about epistemological set-ups and cultural hierarchies? How do they negotiate media boundaries (e.g. ekphrastic literature/documentary photography) and the limits of signification systems such as word and image in order to deal with the processes of cultural and religious othering and the traumatic aftermath of extreme communal violence in contemporary India?

## 2 Ekphrasis and the Pluralist Nation: Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008)

Salman Rushdie is one of the contemporary Indian-British writers whose novels discuss in depth the mediascapes of our times, but also those of earlier periods, and negotiate the role of literature against the influential role of other media such as television (cf. Banerjee 2012), film (Western and Indian movies, cf. Stadtler 2012), photography, painting, drawing, rock music (cf. Neumann's reading of Rushdie's novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, 1999, ↗27 Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures), comic books, commercials and advertising. Several of his characters and narrators are photographers, painters, sculptors, movie stars, television celebrities and art collectors, and hence intimately linked to the visual realm. In spite of the fact that Rushdie's fiction is a prime example of what W. J. T. Mitchell calls an "imagetext" (Mitchell 1994, 9) and although with Rushdie's wealth of verbal pictures "the visual is [...] a site where meaning is constructed and struggles over representation are staged" (Mendes 2012, 1), to date the visual and intermedial dimensions of Rushdie's works are still underinvestigated.

It is notable that already Rushdie's Booker Prize-winning first novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) employs intermedial strategies such as ekphrases of photographs (cf. Barnaby 2005) and paintings in order to negotiate the ambivalence and tensions of

post/colonial politics and India's "fraught relations" to the social other, "to English high culture" (Kortenaar 1997, 232; cf. Kortenaar 2012). Likewise, *The Satanic Verses* (1990), a novel which catapulted Rushdie into the spotlight of international politics when Ayatollah Khomeini issued a death threat (*fatwa*) for blasphemy against the writer in February 1989, is a media-sensitive novel replete with references to today's mediascapes. The novel, with its actor protagonists, ubiquitous film motifs and film techniques (cf. Ramachandran 2005), discusses the close link between India's national and religious identities, inter-religious conflicts, 'digital' religion and the media in a globalized world (cf. Rippl 2011b; cf. van der Veer 2002). Rushdie returns to a discussion of the global media networks and capitalist marketing of pictures and people in his futuristic and dystopian short story "At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers" (1994), where the use of "ekphrastic shorthand" and "ekphrastic minimalism" (Trussler 2000, 267, 271) allows the author to fathom the nature of contemporary visual representation and the inescapable commodification of art and people.

Rushdie's bleak political satire *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) discusses the possibility of a cosmopolitan, secular version of India's postcolonial future (as already propagated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) and "explores tensions between inclusive and exclusive forms of Indian nationalism" (Ball 2003, 36). The novel was written when the Iranian *fatwa* had sent Rushdie into hiding and the blatantly violent communal Hindu-Muslim riots in Mumbai and other parts of India – triggered by the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992 – shocked India and the world in the 1990s. In 1528, the Babri mosque was supposedly erected in the city of Ayodhya on a razed ancient Hindu temple by Babur, the first Mughal Muslim Emperor, and exactly this site has been claimed since 1850 as the (mythical and historically unverifiable) birthplace of the important Hindu deity, Lord Ram (cf. Narain 2006, 57). The *Ramayana*, the story of Ram's life, serves to set Hindus apart from Muslims and aliens in general. Already in the fifteenth century, "as India was colonized by many foreigners, the cult of Ram gained strength and popularity in the Hindu cultural imagination. In the 1980s, Doordarshan, the state-controlled television channel, showcased a highly popular mini-series based on the Ramayana." (Narain 2006, 66 fn. 3) Over the last four centuries, the iconography of popular pictorial depictions of Ram has changed from a benign and effeminate deity to a muscular and militant figure (cf. Kapur 1993). Hindu fundamentalists with their religious-nationalist agenda appreciate this changed iconography, the "Battering Ram" (Rushdie 1995, 363). It does not come as a surprise, then, that Rushdie, in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, depicts the leftist art historian Zeenat Vakil as having "nothing but contempt for Ram-Rajya rhetoric" when the Hindu fundamentalists take control of Bombay in the 1990s; Vakil criticizes that "in a religion with a thousand and one gods they suddenly decide only one chap matters. [...] Hinduism has many holy books, not one, but suddenly it is all Ramayan, Ramayan. [...] A single, martial deity, a single book, and mob rule: that is what they have made of Hindu culture, its many-headed beauty, its peace." (Rushdie 1995, 337–338) *The Moor's Last Sigh* is a novel pursuing an ethical and political project by offer-

ing an alternative story of India's past and the origins of its various ethnic groups. It opposes the distorted historiography of India's nationalists and Hindu fundamentalists, thus sketching different possible ways of conceiving the nation and alternative models of community building. In order to highlight the futility of communal violence (cf. Rushdie 1995, 365), *The Moor's Last Sigh*'s ethical task is to remind its readers of India's pluralist past, "its many-headed beauty," i.e. "to render as familiar [India's] early modern history of cohabitation, obscured by discourses that seek to 'other' and marginalize various groups in the cultural imagination of the country" (Narain 2006, 63).

Rushdie employs two central textual strategies, ekphrasis and palimpsest, to re-imagine an alternative version of India's history as a series of colonizations over time (which result in ethnic 'impurity') and to shift "the focus away from the binary of Hindu and Muslim that has informed the metanarratives of both religious fundamentalists and multicultural assimilationists to challenge and destabilize the familiar dichotomies of Indian political discourse" (Narain 2006, 59). Ekphrasis and palimpsest – the latter is the name for a text, originally on a parchment, which is inscribed with layers of earlier texts – help Rushdie to look at postcolonial Indian Hindu nationalism with its exclusive agenda of ethical 'purity.' It also allows for seeing cosmopolitan Bombay through the ekphrastic and palimpsestic lens of the multiracial and religiously pluralist medieval Moorish Spain before the Catholic Inquisition expelled the Jewish and Muslim populace and sacrificed hybridity in favor of the "purist idea of [a] Christian Spain promoted so fiercely by Ferdinand and Isabella [who] identified the interests of the nation-state with those of a single religious group" (Ball 2003, 42). Rushdie's re-imagined history and his ideal of a secular, pluralistic and heterogeneous India have their parallels in the novel's intermedial aesthetics with its many ekphrastic descriptions of artworks by the protagonist-painter Aurora Zogoiby. Already the novel's title, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, is a reference to Granada's last Muslim ruler Boabdil who according to legend sighed upon his surrender of Granada to the Catholic Spanish monarchs in 1492, as well as to the paintings and frescos by Francisco Pradilla and Francisco Bayeu which use the scene as a motif (cf. Parashkevova 2012, 53). Clearly, Rushdie is a contemporary writer deeply engrossed in visual culture past and present, highbrow and popular, hence it is not surprising that his novel adheres to an intermedial aesthetics. But what is the asset of this aesthetic choice? Why would Rushdie, in a politically engaged novel, take a detour via the visual arts and a painter protagonist to sketch his political and ethical ideal of a secular and pluralist Indian nation? Why did he not write a utopian or dystopian novel without any ekphrastic frills and intermedial configurations? Would not a 'pure' verbal aesthetics have done the same job? These questions can be answered in several ways; here are three possible answers: First of all, his commitment to ekphrasis and an intermedial aesthetics demonstrates Rushdie's conviction that 'pure' media and aesthetics do not exist. Secondly, as Roland Barthes has put it, language, due to its linguistic materiality, its 'unnatural signs,' is not able "to authenticate itself" (Barthes 1982, 85), while visual

media, and photography in particular, have the power of authentication, of bringing absent or non-existent objects before the onlooker's eyes. Ekphrases, then, as *enargetic* descriptive mode (*enargeia* in ancient rhetoric means *Anschaulichkeit*) would have the immersive potential which engages the reader in Rushdie's alternate version of nationhood. Thirdly, the role visual cultures play in Rushdie's fiction attests to his sensitivity to the power of the visual media today; the fact that his focus in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is on painting pays tribute to the central role this visual medium still plays in twentieth-century cosmopolitan Bombay, which has been famous for its art scene and Indian Modernism, and with which Rushdie is familiar. The novel's ekphrastic title allows Rushdie to indicate from the start that the pluralist political vision of India of his protagonist Aurora Zogoiby will not materialize due to the nationalist and fundamentalist forces that have taken control of India's politics since the 1980s.

*The Moor's Last Sigh* is replete with references to and ekphrases of photographs (Rushdie 1995, 12), films, TV commercials, posters, advertisements, cartoons (e.g. the illustration of the celebrated 'Common Man' of the Indian cartoonist R. K. Laxman who started to publish a daily comic strip in *The Times of India* in 1951, 229) and comics superstars (151–152), icons (116, 134), an altar piece (25–26), wall paintings (58–60, 151–152, 154) and sculptures (261–262). *The Moor's Last Sigh* also evokes the cosmopolitanism of Bombay's art world and Indian Modernism; Indian artists (e.g. Raja Ravi Verma, Gaganendranath Tagore, 101, Amrita Sher-Gil, 102), art historians and art critics (e.g. Geeta Kapur, 244; cf. also 329) are mentioned and discussed, as are Indian art history (e.g. the Progressive Artists Movement during the 1940s and 1950s and its "hybrid style that negotiated with the internationalist style of western modernism while also addressing the conditions of social and cultural life in post-independence India," Morton 2012, 38), Western art movements (the Cubists and Surrealists) and Western artists (Matisse, 102, Munch, 218, Michelangelo, 225, Velázquez, 246, Goya and Rembrandt, 303, de Chirico, 408, El Greco, 415), art galleries (244, 253), museums (the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi, 101–103) and exhibitions (like the 1978 Kassel Documenta show, 244). There are also architectural ekphrases, such as the Cochin synagogue with its antique blue-and-white Cantonese tiles prone to metamorphosis (75–77) or the Little Alhambra in the fictive Andalusian village Benengeli built by Vasco Miranda, a painter character in Rushdie's novel (408; cf. also 433 for a short description of the real Alhambra).

While there are a few ekphrases of artworks by the fictional painter Vasco Miranda (Rushdie 1995, 151–152, 158, cf. his palimpsest painting 159–160) and the sculptor-character Uma Sarasvati (261), the notional ekphrases (cf. Hollander 1975, 4, 7–9) of Aurora Zogoiby's paintings, drawings, water-colors, and sculptures (cf. Rushdie 1995, 115) are center-stage. The novel follows the creative life and artistic career of Aurora da Gama, from her early years and first wall painting full of Indian landmarks, heroes, kings, politicians, religious figures, family members and "creatures of fancy, the hybrids" (Rushdie 1995, 59). This early artwork, whose ekphrasis is three pages long (cf. Rushdie 1995, 58–60), already shows typical features of Aurora's

later surrealist, palimpsestic artistic style (cf. for instance the ekphrasis of her painting *The Scandal*, 102–103). The young 21-year-old Aurora sat down at the Bombay factory gates during the strikes in February 1946 and captured the historical events in charcoal drawings, thus depicting the bleak reality of the workers' lives (cf. ekphrases in Rushdie 1995, 129–131). This is one of only two attempts at realist and naturalist art, and even then her sketches were "not merely reportorial, but personal, with a violent breakneck passion of line that had the force of a physical assault" (Rushdie 1995, 131). This "physical assault" which propels strong emotional affect and physical reaction in the recipient is a quality in many of Aurora's works and somewhat reminiscent of Pinney's concept of 'corpothetics.' The second time Aurora ponders how far "realism" and "clear-sighted naturalism" could be an aesthetics to follow was in the decade after India's Independence, but once her artistic crisis is over she decides once and for all that 'patriotic mimesis,' with its documentary pictures of India's life, are not for her, that her art is a fantastic, a magical one dealing with "the reality of dreams" (cf. Rushdie 1995, 173–174, 179). It is then that she decides to make her son Moraes, alias the 'Moor' (who is the victim of an incurable premature-aging disorder), "the talisman and centerpiece of her art" (Rushdie 1995, 174), and for the next few decades creates the famous series of major canvases called 'the Moor sequence' with its masterpiece *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Aurora's son and model explains these 'Moor paintings' are divided into three distinct periods:

> The 'early' pictures, made between 1957 and 1977, that is to say between the year of my birth and that of the election that swept Mrs. G. from power [...]; the 'great' or 'high' years, 1977–81, during which she created the glowing, profound works with which her name is most often associated; and the so-called 'dark Moors', those monochrome pictures of exile and terror which she painted after my departure and which include her last, unfinished, unsigned masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (170 x 247 cms., oil on canvas, 1987)[.] (Rushdie 1995, 218)

The majority of the pictures described in *The Moor's Last Sigh* are imaginary works of art and the ekphrases hence notional ones; however, there are also references to actual paintings, e.g. to Bhupen Khakhar's "You Can't Please All" (1981; cf. *Khakhar*), as Joel Kuortti (2012) has convincingly argued (cf. the ekphrasis of Aurora's painting "You Can't always Get Your Wish" in Rushdie 1995, 202: "a teeming Bombay street-scene [...] is surveyed from a first-floor balcony by the full-length nude figure"). Aurora Zogoiby's *sujet* "Mother India" (Rushdie 1995, 60) and the topic of her monochrome "dark Moors" dealing with exile and terror seem to foreshadow the haunting case of India's internationally renowned modernist Muslim artist Maqbool Fida Husain, a member of Bombay's Progressive Artists' Group, who – just like Rushdie's Aurora Zogoiby – was attacked in the 1990s by the fanatical Hindu Right, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a right-wing political group allied with the Bharatiya Janata Party (cf. Guha-Takurta 2011, 35).

The notional ekphrases of Aurora Zogoiby's (fictional) paintings are delivered by her son Moraes, Rushdie's first-person narrator, the hybrid offspring of Portuguese

Christian and Indian-Cochin Jewish (and probably Spanish-Jewish as well as Arabic-Muslim) ancestry. In the story of his own life as a member of a minority group (Christian-Jewish), which he tells from hindsight, he links his family's history to that of India's history, from colonialism to a secular, independent India until the rise of right-wing Hindu fundamentalism in the 1980s. Moraes helps to visualize his mother's painted ideal of a secular and multicultural society and a plural nation – even if this envisioned plurality, in the end, fails, giving way to a politically and religiously polarized world (cf. Narain 2006, 65). As his mother's model, Moraes is represented in the 'Moor' paintings as an allegory of India as "pluralistic, hybrid, gentle giant," but eventually comes to symbolize a violation of the nation's "founding principle of pluralistic secularism" (Ball 2003, 47). In January 1970, Aurora Zogoiby re-imagines the "old Boabdil story" (i.e. the story of Granada's last Muslim ruler) in one of her 'Moor' paintings by placing the Alhambra on Bombay's Malabar Hill, a setting she calls "Mooristan" and "Palimpstine," metaphors for a "[p]lace where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another" (Rushdie 1995, 226):

> The Alhambra quickly became a not-quite Alhambra; elements of India's own red forts, the Mughal palace-fortresses in Delhi and Agra, blended Mughal splendours with the Spanish building's Moorish grace. The hill became a not-Malabar looking down upon a not-quite-Chowpatty, and the creatures of Aurora's imagination began to populate it – monsters, elephant-deities, ghosts. The water's edge, the dividing line between two worlds, became in many of these pictures the main focus of her concern. [...] At the water's edge strange composite creatures slithered to and fro across the frontier of the elements. (Rushdie 1995, 226)

Like Rushdie's own palimpsestic writing style in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (cf. Kuortti 2012), Aurora Zogoiby's vivid surrealist painterly style is palimpsestic, with subjects exploring how far a Nehruvian secular and cosmopolitan nationalism is possible in India. Her early palimpsest-paintings of "Mooristan" and "Palimpstine" seek to conjure up "a golden age" when "Jews, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains" co-existed peacefully; she "uses Arab Spain to re-imagine India" in her "attempt to create a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation" (Rushdie 1995, 227). However, disappointed by her son, in her last 'Moor' pictures Aurora stops using the Moor-figure as "a unifier of opposites, a standard-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol – however approximate – of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay" (Rushdie 1995, 303). Many of her last pictures in which the Moor appeared are collages and diptychs created out of "the city's unwanted detritus" (Rushdie 1995, 302; cf. Parashkevova 2012, 52, for a discussion of the diptych form). While for most of her creative life "the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and mélange" stood for her notion of the "Good," Aurora Zogoiby now has to learn that a potential darkness lurks everywhere (Rushdie 1995, 303). Rushdie thus also expresses his political values of pluralist Indian communities and a multicultural Indian nation in the ethical notional ekphrases of Aurora's late paintings: "Full of grotesque figures fusing human and animal parts, with breasts for but-

tocks or whole bodies made from urban rubbish, Aurora's teeming canvases signify a grand, all-encompassing vision"; they not only "seem to be the visual equivalent of Rushdie's encyclopedic, grotesque, magic-realist novels," but also "part of the grand merging and palimpsesting of worlds that both she and Rushdie perform to advance their more or less mutual idea of contemporary India as a type of Moorish Spain." (Ball 2003, 41–42) Multicultural medieval Arab Spain is presented by Rushdie, alias Aurora Zogoiby, as an ideal which parallels the inclusive and pluralist nationalism supported by Nehru in the 1940s and 1950s. It is threatened by the dangerous Hindu nationalist forces whose fundamentalist ideology of cultural purity have gained influence since the 1980s, finding a first culmination point in the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in 1992. Rushdie's descriptive, i.e. ekphrastic, ethics visualizes India's past and negotiates India's secular postcolonial present. Rushdie's word-image intersections are charged with cultural significance and are a "site of conflict, a nexus where political, institutional, and social antagonisms play themselves out in the materiality of representation" (Mitchell 1994, 91). Rushdie's intermedial aesthetics is an "assault on binary distinctions" – artistic but also cultural, political and ideological ones –, his refusal of "an aesthetics of purity" challenges "dividing practices in society" and argues for "an acceptance of and tolerance for the complexity of culture"; Rushdie's "ekphrastic hope, in this regard, is that writing can sufficiently reach beyond its own formal boundaries – can approximate the visual enough – to demonstrate, at one of the most fundamental levels of textuality, that otherness is never absolute" (Teverson 2012, 26–27).

While in *The Moor's Last Sigh* the painter Aurora Zogoiby reimagines India through the lens of Granada's golden age under Muslim rulers, in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) Rushdie again goes back in history and chooses settings which Western historiography describes as early modern. *The Enchantress of Florence* is preoccupied with the act of storytelling and ways of world making: Akbar the Great's court at Fatehpur Sikri is the frame narrative within which the Florence traveler Mogor dell'Amore alias Niccolò Vespucci – and supposedly the grandson of Emperor Barbur's sister, the lost Mughal princess Qara Köz (the Lady with the Black Eyes) – tells, amongst many other tales, the story of Qara Köz's peripatetic life in Asia, Europe and finally the New World. Bishnupriya Ghosh sees the "cultural work" of contemporary historical novels such as Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* in their "*historical cosmopolitanism*: a recuperation, and inevitable reinvention, of discontinuous 'pasts,' usually told from localized perspectives but threaded into a greater story of a *global* history." (Ghosh 2011, 15) In *The Enchantress of Florence*, for instance, Rushdie brings together the Medici's sixteenth-century Florence and the capital and court of the Mughal empire, multicultural and cosmopolitan Fatehpur Sikri, built by the great Muslim emperor Akbar. Both cities mirror each other, thus enabling a comparative perspective on global history. As Mughal India was a time of cultural intermingling and hybridity, "Mughal hybridity as represented in *The Enchantress of Florence* [...] is associated with the search for harmony in uniting different styles, ideas, and cultural practices"

(Thiara 2011, 416). In particular, Akbar, who reigned from 1556 to 1605, is a significant secular ruler whose policy of religious toleration and intellectual openness allowed for communal, tribal and ethnic harmony and cultural synthesis (cf. Eraly 2000, 163). Rushdie is drawn to this image of Akbar's Indian culture as hybrid, inclusive and composite and describes him as a man who trusts beauty and painting, but not religious faith (Rushdie 2009, 72); Akbar is "the Universal Ruler, king of a world without frontiers or ideological limitations" (387), a "Muslim vegetarian, a warrior who wanted only peace, a philosopher-king: a contradiction in terms" whose tolerance allows for "a place of disputation where everything could be said to everyone by anyone on any subject, including the non-existence of God and the abolition of kings" (41, 45; cf. Thiara 2011, 418 for a discussion of Rushdie's reflections on the dangers of hybridity and cultural intermingling). As Jorrit Britschgi points out, the historical Akbar had an enormous interest in the arts and

> allotted considerable resources to the making of artistic weapons, toreutic works, magnificent fabrics and the translation and transcription of texts that were then illustrated in the court workshops. In architecture, through the fusion of different styles, Akbar created a vocabulary that combined local and foreign languages, likewise in the painting ateliers at court a style developed that radically departed from Persian and pre-Mughal traditions and marked subsequent developments in Mughal painting. (Britschgi 2012, 61)

In Rushdie's novel, Akbar's love of imagination and fictions in general is first illustrated by his love for the phantasmatic Hindu queen Jodha Bai, his "imaginary wife, dreamed up by Akbar [...], the emperor was of the opinion that it was the real queens who were the phantoms and the non-existent beloved who was real" (Rushdie 2009, 33). Jodha Bai, the equivalent of Qara Köz who will later captivate Akbar's imagination, is portrayed on Akbar's request by the Persian master Abdus Samad, who

> painted her from the memory of a dream without ever looking upon her face, and when the emperor saw his work he clapped his hands at the beauty shining up from the page. 'You have captured her, to the life,' he cried, and Abdus Samad relaxed and stopped feeling as if his head was too loosely attached to his neck; and after this visionary work by the master of the emperor's atelier had been exhibited, the whole court knew Jodha to be real, [...] all acknowledged not only her existence but also her beauty, her wisdom, the grace of her movements and the softness of her voice. Akbar and Jodhabai! It was the love story of the age. (Rushdie 2009, 34)

What this quote demonstrates, apart from the precarious implications of the patronage system, is the power of world making ascribed to painting and art. Rushdie's novel, just as all his previous novels, is replete with descriptions of cities, in this case Florence (e.g. Rushdie 2009, 347–348) and Fatehpur Sikri (8–9, 10–11, 33, 35), of palaces and rooms (82, 349, 363), of jewelry and illuminated Qur'an texts (19–20), of paintings and frescos. In addition to Italian Renaissance painters such as Botticelli (Rushdie 2009, 168), del Sarto and Lippi (337, 365) as well as the Persian miniature painters such as Behzad (c. 1450–c. 1535), statues are mentioned (e.g. a statue of

Mars, 189) and female body painting (194). Chapter 9 of Rushdie's novel encompasses fifteen pages filled with ekphrases of paintings of Qara Köz done by the protagonist Akbar's favorite painter, Dashwanth. The first master of the imperial art studio, the Persian Mir Sayyid Ali (for information on this famous historical miniature painter, as well as on Abd al-Samad, cf. Britschgi 2012, 62), takes Dashwanth under his wing when the latter enters the studio as a teenager (at the age of thirteen Dashwanth has already made his name with caricatures of court grandees, cf. Rushdie 2009, 146–147). Dashwanth paints "bearded giants flying through the air on enchanted urns, and the hairy, spotted goblins known as *devs*, and violent storms at sea, and blue-and-gold dragons, and heavenly sorcerers whose hands reached down from the clouds to save heroes from harm, to satisfy the wild, fantastic imagination – the *khayal* – of the youthful king [Akbar]" (Rushdie 2009, 147–148). With his depressive, melancholic moods, the Indian painter Dashwanth is the prototype of the inspired European Renaissance artist suffering from the same disease. One of his big artistic projects is dedicated to the legendary adventures of Hamza, hero of the *Hamzanama* (cf. Britschgi 2012, 64–65):

> Over and over again, he painted the legendary hero Hamza on his three-eyed fairy horse overcoming improbable monsters of all types, and understood better than any other artist involved in the fourteen-year-long Hamza cycle which was the atelier's pride and joy that he was painting the emperor's dream-autobiography into being, that although his hand held the brush it was the emperor's vision that was appearing on the painted cloth. [...] The hero in Dashwanth's pictures [i.e. Hamza, GR] became the emperor's mirror, and all the one hundred and one artists gathered in the studio learned from him, even the Persian masters, Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdus Samad. In their collaborative paintings of the adventures of Hamza and his friends, Mughal Hindustan was literally being invented; the union of the artists prefigured the unity of empire and, perhaps, brought it into being. (Rushdie 2009, 148)

While there are no references to stylistic features of the folios of the *Hamzanama*, which derive from the Persian painting tradition and hence contrast with "the traditional Indian horizontal format," depicting the episodes "from a slightly-elevated, bird's eye perspective" (Britschgi 2012, 65), this quote demonstrates how Rushdie uses ekphrasis to expose the emperor's ab/uses of painting for political goals, how painting as "visual political propaganda" (Cottier 2014, 144) becomes an imperial form of world making ("Mughal Hindustan was literally being invented"). Akbar orders Dashwanth to restore the hidden princess and lost great-aunt Qara Köz "to the history of her family at last. 'Paint her into the world,' he exhorted Dashwanth, 'for there is such magic in your brushes that she may even come to life, spring off your pages and join us for feasting and wine.'" (Rushdie 2009, 149) According to the stories told by the wanderer Vespucci, alias Mogor dell'Amore, Dashwanth, in a "series of extraordinary folios" (Rushdie 2009, 149), paints several stages of the princess's childhood, but the first painting already "worked as a kind of magic, because the moment the old Princess Gulbadan looked at it in Akbar's private rooms she remembered the

girl's name" (Rushdie 2009, 150). He goes on to paint her early years until she became the young beauty with those dark eyes which "drew you in and you saw the power lurking in their depths" and "it became plain that some higher power had captured his brush." (Rushdie 2009, 155 and 156) Dashwanth's art is an intermedial art when he paints a part of the last verse of the "'Prince of Poets', the supreme versifier of the Chaghatai language, Ali-Shir Nava'i of Herat [...] into the pattern of the fabric of Qara Köz's garment." (Rushdie 2009, 156–157) However, while indefatigably painting the final picture of the *Qara-Köz-Nama* (the Adventures of Lady Black Eyes), Dashwanth becomes profoundly melancholic, eventually vanishing completely. It turns out that Dashwanth's last painting

> did not stop at the patterned borders in which Dashwanth had set it but, at least in the bottom left-hand corner, continued for some distance beneath that ornate two-inch wide frame. [...] under the supervision of the two Persian masters the painted border was carefully separated from the main body of the work. When the hidden section of the painting was revealed the onlookers burst into cries of amazement, for there, crouching down like a little toad, with a green bundle of paper scrolls under his arms, was Dashwanth the great painter, [...] Dashwanth released into the only world in which he now believed, the world of the hidden princess, whom he had created and who had then uncreated him. [...] Instead of bringing a fantasy woman to life, Dashwanth had turned himself into an imaginary being [...]. (Rushdie 2009, 159)

Chapter 9 testifies to the power of painting to conjure up people and things and to bring them to life. With the visual medium of painting, Dashwanth not only turns himself into an imaginary being, he also manages to bring Qara Köz, the formerly lost princess from historical records (due to her powerful half-sister Khanzada who obliterated her), back to the memory of the royal family. Rushdie employs Dashwanth's art of painting and the narrator's art of ekphrasis, i.e. the lively description of the Qara Köz paintings, here as a postcolonial project of rewriting history. The imaginary Mughal artworks of Qara Köz are not described in great detail, nor are their formal features discussed (what is their format? were they in the Persian miniature tradition?); they are rather evocations appealing to the reader's imagination. What Rushdie's ekphrastic art achieves, however, is to write a princess, i.e. a woman, into history: "It seems remarkable that Qara Köz receives, post mortem, her own history. After all, the histories of Babar and Akbar are about heroic deeds, about battles and adventures. They serve to consolidate power and to elevate the emperor to a near-divine status. In contrast, Qara Köz's story is one of migration, assimilation, love, loss, and of the power of enchantment." (Cottier 2014, 147)

Negotiating Indian historical and modern painting and art, Rushdie's ekphrastic imagetexts tell the story of a secular, multicultural and pluralist India without communal strife, and write migration, exile and immigration, as well as women as constitutive members of the Indian nation, back into its history. As projects in global history, Indian and Western art history and intermedial aesthetics, Rushdie's novels build on the political and ethical impact of ekphrasis: Through ekphrasis, the power of the

visual is put on display and the visual politics of imperial painting exposed. Through notional ekphrasis of an imaginary painting, Rushdie is able to turn a woman into the chief character of Indian history, celebrated in Dashwanth's epic painterly art.

## 3 Ekphrasis as Antidote: Communal Violence in Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006)

Unlike Rushdie, who does not include representations of pictures in the two novels discussed and who deals with painting through notional ekphrasis, in Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006) the pictures are not paintings, but three documentary press photographs which are present in material form. Thus Jha's novel is intermedial in two ways: it is multimedial because it combines text with photographs (cf. Rippl 2011a, 2011b; cf. contributions ↗Part I: Text and Image, section on Literature and Photography), and due to the inclusion of ekphrases we also deal with intermedial references. *Fireproof*, Jha's third novel, is a trauma novel (cf. Caruth 1996; Whitehead 2004; Kaplan 2005) which describes, in a very impressive way, communal violence in India. While Rushdie turned to the past to evoke visions of alternate, pluralistic notions of community and a secular nation, Jha's project is one that not only involves a different visual medium and different text-picture relationships, it also serves a different goal than Rushdie's novels: In *Fireproof*, both text and photographic images serve, either on their own or in combination, as media of traumatic memory, displacement, amnesia and possibly as means of reconciliation and healing. We have come to understand photography against the backdrop of theoretical debates shaped by two scholars and their work in particular: Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1982) and Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1979). One important difference between photography and literary text seems to be that the former serves as visual evidence, we tend to trust it easily, while we believe the latter, due to its linguistic materiality, to have the potential to distort and spin reality. As Roland Barthes put it: "No writing can give me this certainty. It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself. [...] but the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself [...]" (Barthes 1982, 85, 87). Susan Sontag, too, states that we tend to understand photography as "miniatures of reality" (Sontag 1979, 4): "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. [...] A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that given thing happened." (Sontag 1979, 5) That is, although we are aware of the digital malleability of photographs, we still tend to consider them as silent witnesses and documents whose indexical power transports truth and produces presence, i.e. we fall into the indexical or representational trap of photography (cf. William J. Mitchell 1994; Lister 1995). This is also true for documentary photography, which is usually perceived as "a neutral, styleless, and objective

record of information. The document is usually thought to be devoid of subjective intention, even of human will – it is frequently claimed that the camera produces images automatically, as if unaided by an operator." (Edwards 2006, 12) Documentary photographs allegedly "entail an objective, unmediated record of facts. Documentary is said to provide its viewers with direct access to truth" (Edwards 2006, 27); there is supposedly no retouching, no posing, no staging, no additional lighting or dramatic light effects.

By including and narrativizing three press photographs of devastation in his novel *Fireproof* (2006), New Delhi based writer and Executive Editor of the *Indian Express*, Raj Kamal Jha discusses the violent ethnic riots between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat in February 2002. Jha's negotiation of photography's documentary function, the intricate narrative style and interesting typographic experiments in the novel make it a formally demanding text. The collection of fictive eyewitness reports of atrocities and communal violence (cf. Allen 1993; Randeria 1996; Brass 2003) presented in *Fireproof* comment on the bleak facts and figures of the Gujarat riots which Jha includes in the 'Author's Notes':

> Beginning February 28, 2002 – and continuing for almost a month – cities and villages across the state saw unprecedented violence targeted against Muslims, with clear evidence in many cases that police, if not complicit, looked the other way as the massacres went on. Over a thousand men, women, and children were killed, more than 70 per cent of them Muslim.
>
> Seven months after the violence, the BJP government in the state was re-elected with a landslide majority. [...]
>
> *
>
> *The numbers, as of June 2006:*
> *All figures are government figures, including official intelligence estimates:*
>
> *Total number killed:* 784 Muslims, 258 Hindus.
> *Number of houses destroyed: 12,000*
> Number of shops looted and burnt: 14,000
> *Number of villages affected: 993*
> *Number of towns affected: 151*
> Total number of cases filed by the police: 4,252
> *Cases where charges were framed: 2,019*
> Cases closed for what the police said was 'lack of evidence': 2,032
>
> *The Supreme Court of India has played an exemplary role in prodding and pushing the state's institutions to deliver justice. On its instructions, some cases were shifted out of state to ensure a free and fair trial. And all cases, including those previously closed, have been ordered to be reviewed.*
> Total number of cases reviewed: 1989
> Cases re-opened: 1763
> Cases where trial is on: 28
> Number of cases ending in convictions: 10
> (Jha 2006, 386–387)[2]

**2** India's national election of spring 2014 made Narenda Modi India's new prime minister. Modi used to be Gujarat's president when the brutal pogroms of Muslim citizens took place in 2002, and which

Jha's paratextual, sober and fact-like listing of the number of Gujarat victims of blatant communal violence alludes to the human tragedies involved. It is one of the ethical achievements of the novel to report on the fate of victims, to tell the stories of individual lives. Through the rhetorical device of prosopopeia *Fireproof* is able to give those a voice that can neither be heard in newspapers, TV, online news media on the Internet nor in historiographic documents: the silent dead victims and tacit persecutors, who whisper to us from the footnotes, thus attesting to the tragic events of communal violence (cf. Cottier 2013). Jha's multi-perspective aesthetics reports in a modern urban Indian setting the unsettling social and political events, such as the dramatic increase in Hindu-nationalism and communal violence, by using intermedial devices and fantastic modes of story-telling where the dead talk to us and take us on a trip to the underworld, a place where the persecutor Mr. Jay is confronted with his victims.

Right at the beginning the reader is told that Mr. Jay is taking home a newborn baby from the hospital while communal violence rages in the streets. He believes that this heavily maimed baby is his own. And while it has neither legs nor arms, its beautiful, brisk eyes never stay still. Due to its immobility, the deformed and maimed baby is reminiscent of a photo camera and it is certainly no coincidence that photography, visuality and seeing play such a crucial role in Jha's novel. Throughout the novel, but in particular in chapters 11, 12 and 13 (which consist of e-mail attachments), terms such as 'eyes,' 'to see,' 'to look at' etc. crop up constantly, and throughout the novel visual media, acts of eye-witnessing, pictures and focus are mentioned (cf. for instance Jha 2006, 183, where the verb 'to see' is used twelve times). So in addition to and in conjunction with photography, the novel repeatedly evokes India's visual cultures and the traditional practices of *darshan*, the divine gaze: The eyes of the immobile baby are not only reminiscent of a camera, they also resemble the alert and never resting eyes of the Hindu gods, whose attention nothing ever escapes. Jha's use of three documentary photos in *Fireproof* which were taken from the *Indian Express* and shot by his colleagues Javed Raja und Harsh Shah, show the devastation after the violent riots in Gujarat in 2002. They allow Jha to develop new literary modes to communicate what is usually hard to express, let alone to understand: guilt, violence, trauma. In the hospital, the protagonist finds by accident "a photograph lying

cost over 1000 Muslims their lives and drew hundreds of thousands into ghettos. Some voices have claimed that Modi, high-ranking BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) politician and Hindu-nationalist, had mongered hate which ignited the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002 and should hence be made responsible for the torturing and killing of so many Muslims.

wedged in the narrow space between the mattress and the bed's headboard" (Jha 2006, 61) after having seen the same scene in a dream.

**Fig. 1:** Javed Raja and Harsh Shah, detail of press photograph capturing the outbreaks of communal violence in Gujarat in February 2002 for the *Indian Express*. Jha 2006, 61.

At this point it becomes obvious how Jha deals with photography: Not only does he provide a reproduction of the photo, he also delivers an ekphrasis of it which at first seems to describe the depicted scene truthfully down to the minutest detail. Only eventually does the reader notice that the protagonist's ekphrasis, which is explicitly addressed to her, trying to involve her, does not match her own reception of the picture; no matter how long she looks at the picture she cannot see what the protagonist seems to see there:

> The photograph shows a pavement. A street in a city, perhaps this city itself because look at the rubble lining it, covering it completely, not even leaving a space for pedestrians to walk.
>
> There is a sapling that grows beside the pavement, you can see it in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture, and another a bit to the right, both stunted because their roots are trapped in cement, their leaves breathe in the fumes of petrol, diesel and kerosene of vehicles, their stems are drenched with the spit of strangers.
>
> In the foreground, that's where I would like to draw your attention, in the pile of garbage, are three things lying on the street.
>
> Near the top edge of the picture, to the right of the half-way mark, you can see two stones, one on top of the other, the pair looking a bit like a hat dropped onto the pavement. Right in front of this are three things that don't seem to be visible in the photograph: a book, a wristwatch. And then a piece of cloth, more like a towel, since I could see the threading on the fabric, the curls that give it its furry feel. The book is open, almost halfway. The watch is lying, face down, its strap unfastened, maybe its dial face has broken, maybe it fell. The towel lies inches away from the book and the watch in a tiny crumpled heap. (Jha 2006, 62)

Only at the end of the novel does the reader understand why the protagonist is able to see more than s/he, why he can zoom into the picture: The photo functions as the trigger of displaced memories, reminding Mr. Jay of his own participation in the torturing and killing of innocent Muslim citizens. During his desperate search for help for the handicapped baby, Mr. Jay travels through a town drowning in communal violence after having received instructions via e-mail from a mysterious stranger called Miss Glass about where to go to get help for the child. The e-mail has three attach-

ments, *Tariq.doc*, *Shabnam.doc,* and *Abba.doc*, which describe the murderous attacks on parents from the perspective of three traumatized Muslim children who witness their torturing and killing. Each of the three e-mail attachments is preceded by one black-and-white photograph showing destroyed buildings, interiors and objects.

The partly reproduced photo showing rubble lying on a pavement is not only accompanied by an ekphrasis in chapter 3 of the novel (Jha 2006, 61); in chapter 11, *Tariq (The First Attachment)*, where the photograph is reproduced in its entirety, it is described once again.

**Fig. 2:** Javed Raja and Harsh Shah, press photograph capturing the outbreaks of communal violence in Gujarat in February 2002 for the *Indian Express*. Jha 2006, 171.

While this second ekphrasis of the photo refers to a boy who is nowhere to be seen, the photo takes on an important narrative function as a trigger for Tariq's story, who was forced to witness the rape and killing of his mother.

> Our first eyewitness is a boy. Name is Tariq, he is ten, or, at the most, eleven years old. He wears shorts and a T-shirt although this is February and it is cold, and if you look close enough, you will see his elbows and his knees are bare. The skin covering them is cracked and dry. [...]
>
> That's his house in the picture.
>
> A simple frame. Simpler than the house a child would draw when told to draw a house. Just a long rectangular box, the windows cut out as an afterthought. The house built, as if, not to defy the elements (the rain, the sun, the dank or the chill), but instead to surrender itself to them, its plaster to be streaked, its corners to be shadowed, its walls to be eroded. Unprepared, totally, for fire, for men intending to kill and burn. That's why the door's gone, the windows and the ceiling, all shattered into countless pieces scattered inside and out. There are some clouds in the sky but no evidence of smoke, it's bright, it's clear. (Jha 2006, 171–172)

Chapter 12, *Shabnam (The Second Attachment)*, also features a photo at the beginning, and starts with an ekphrasis of the auto rickshaw depicted in the photo.

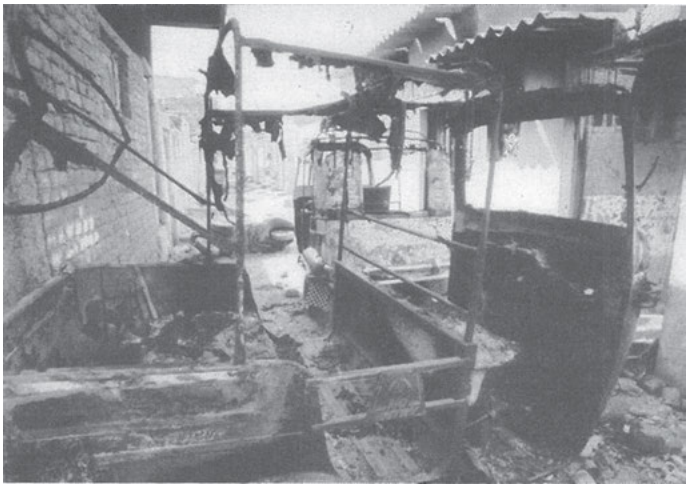

**Fig. 3:** Javed Raja and Harsh Shah, press photograph capturing the outbreaks of communal violence in Gujarat in February 2002 for the *Indian Express*. Jha 2006, 188.

Again, the ekphrastic description of the photo serves to introduce the torturing and killing of Shabnam's parents (described in gory detail, cf. Jha 2006, 197–201) and the girl's flight from the traumatic crime scene:

> This is her father's auto-rickshaw, her father who had been killed, her mother, too. This is a city on fire. And she's running, she's running, she's running, this second eyewitness.
>
> Name is Shabnam.
>
> Age sixteen, plus or minus one. This daughter this girl this woman this child, in black salwar kameez, her shoes with shoelaces, melting and dropping off, their soles, their straps, their leather, their plastic, their everything. [...]
>
> And Shabnam isn't used to running so hard, running so long, Father would have never allowed it. [...]
>
> She runs past houses, apartment buildings named after Hindu gods and goddesses, the idols painted in cement, garlanded with marigold flowers made of plaster coloured red or orange, gods staring at her saying you are not welcome here, keep running. (Jha 2006, 188–189, 194–195)

When escaping her parents' killers, Shabnam runs past houses decorated with Hindu gods and goddesses. However, as a Muslim, she cannot feel their blessing gaze. In fact, they seem to tell her that she is not welcome in this community.

It is not surprising that Jha includes photographs in a novel which deals with communal violence, traumatized Muslim victims and Hindu perpetrators when one remembers Susan Sontag's claim that "[a]ll photographs are *memento mori*" (Sontag

1979, 15). Jha presents photographs as *memento mori* which function via negativity: The murdered victims cannot be seen in the photos, the destroyed houses and interiors refer to them solely metonymically. Due to their static quality photographs have often been compared to the frozen, intrusive memory pictures of traumatized people. Ulrich Baer, for instance, highlights the structural parallels between "trauma as the puzzling accurate imprinting on the mind of an overwhelming reality" (2002, 8) and photography:

> The startling effect (and affect) of many photographs, then, results not only from their adherence to conventions of realism and codes of authenticity or to their place in the mental-image repertory largely stocked by the media. It comes as well from photography's ability to confront the viewer with a moment that had the potential to be experienced but perhaps was not. In viewing such photographs we are witnessing a mechanically recorded instant that was not necessarily registered by the subject's own consciousness.
>
> This possibility that photographs capture unexperienced events creates a striking parallel between the workings of the camera and the structure of traumatic memory. (Baer 2002, 8)

While outbreaks of communal violence are presented in newspaper articles in a sober, neutral and objective way, literature allows the discussion of communal violence in a more subjective and emotional fashion. Together with ekphrases, the documentary photographs Jha includes in his novel tell stories of torture, destruction and death, thus making the reader face the effects of India's communal tensions and religious othering, to face trauma and to empathize with the three traumatized children. While documentary photographs are commonly understood as a means of authentication, in Jha's novel the words de-authenticate the pictures by describing things not to be seen in them. The use of the present tense lends the traumatized children's stories a high degree of immediacy which may support the insight into the necessity of building a secular and pluralist community. The fact that Jha combines the medium of text with the medium of photography and, in addition, yokes together a fantastic mode of writing with documentary photography, opens up not only new aesthetic possibilities, but also ethical ones not usually at the disposal of political novels.

## 4 Conclusion: Ethical Ekphrasis – Descriptive Ethics

Whereas Jay David Bolter claimed in 1996 that pictures today dominate the texts they accompany and that ekphrastic descriptions have to fight for their legitimacy (261, 271), the intermedial aesthetics of Rushdie's and Jha's novels discussed above prove exactly the opposite. As we have seen, there is a whole range of intermedial text-picture intersections in contemporary Anglophone Indian novels. Salman Rushdie employs ekphrastic strategies to discuss political and politico-religious issues such as the possibility of secular postcolonial democracy in India, the right-wing ideology of Hinduvata and the politically enforced Indian religious fundamentalism in an age of

neo-liberal globalization, the new media and the networks of the worldwide communication systems. The importance of the modern artworks in *The Moor's Last Sigh* lies in providing Rushdie with "a conceptual space for exploring the pressures and contradictions of postcolonial modernity: a space for inventing and re-inventing the nation, and for testing and exploring the limitations and aporia of India's secular democracy" (Morton 2012, 32). In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Aurora Zogoiby's canvases depict Bombay as an ideal cosmopolitan space until this idealized Bombay is destroyed by right-wing Hindu nationalism (compared in the novel to the late fifteenth-century Spanish *Reconquista*). Both of Rushdie's painter characters, Aurora Zogoiby and Dashwanth, produce paintings that fathom the possibility of a pluralistic Indian nation, they sketch alternative national histories and negotiate the power of images as well as their political ab/uses. In analogy to what Paul Ricoeur, Martha Nussbaum, Adam Zachary Newton and others have called a 'narrative ethics,' Rushdie's project of ekphrastically reimagining those periods in Indian history characterized by pluralistic and inclusive visions of community (cf. Claviez 2014 for a discussion of the 'metonymic society'), can be called an 'ekphrastic ethics.' The ekphrases-press photography interactions in Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* display yet other functions of postcolonial intermedial writing: They trigger stories, document, give evidence to crimes, boost processes of remembering and verbalize traumatic experience. Ekphrasis as a means of captioning and describing the photographs of communal violence makes us focus our attention and ruminate on the photographed communal crime scenes at a time when deluges of digitally produced pictures swamp us, and forgetting and attention deficits are the rule. Jha's inclusion and detailed description of press photographs related to the violent communal riots in India in the new millennium not only demonstrate the ethical commitment of press photography in his political novel, but also the ethics of his ekphrases. Rushdie's as well as Jha's uses of a postcolonial ekphrastic poetics are dedicated to ethical ends: As 'counter-descriptions,' they revisit sites of India's (far and near) past, analyze processes of religious and ethnic othering, and they fathom political ab/uses of images, thus opening ethical paths into the future.

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